



081. May 1/14, 1971. Prophet Jeremiah

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : May 3, 2016

Dear Brother in Christ, Anastasios [Luebke],
Christ is risen!

We were glad to hear from you, and pray that this finds you well and in the grace of our Risen Lord.

In the same mail with your letter we received a letter from Priestmonk Innocent, who enclosed a copy of a part of his recent letter to you, concerning the names “Herman” and “Germain.” He had recently written us two letters on the same subject, which we had not yet answered — we were slow in answering, to be frank, because we are not at all interested in entering into controversy on this subject, considering it to be of very minor importance. Fr. Innocent, however, insists that it is extremely important, and he even seems determined to make a regular campaign out of the issue; therefore, I have just written him a letter, and I write this now to you, so that our Brotherhoods opinion on the subject might be known.

When our Brotherhood was formed, we gave some thought to the variant versions of this name. Some people, for reasons unknown to us, are very adamant for one form or another, although Fr. Innocent is the first person we have heard to defend “Germain” with such determination. Others have said that the name should or even must be German, Gherman, Guerman, Germanus, Germanos, even Gairman. There are things to be said for and against almost all of these; and we finally decided to accept the name “Herman” for one simple reason: it has long been the accepted English usage of those who love and revere the Saint, in Alaska and elsewhere. Call it a philological accident if you will, nonetheless the usage is well established (and the Saint himself has granted miracles to those who use it!), and it would require a major campaign, probably causing much bad feeling and totally unnecessary fighting, to establish any other version in its place. Such a campaign, we believe, would be a sin, because it would detract from more important things and it would constitute precisely what Fr. Innocent calls the forcing of a “private usage” upon the Church. Incidentally, the Slavonic “G” is actually closer to English “H” than “G”, and so “Herman” is just about the closest way of transcribing the pronunciation of the Slavonic name.

We are amazed that Fr. Innocent insists that his way is the only “proper traditional way of doing things in the Church.” Despite his insistence, we cannot see that one spelling should be preferred over another as a matter of principle. The question is not one of “principle” at all but of usage. He is doubtless correct that the standard form of “Germanus” in English at one time was “Germain.” But language and its usages, which are relative, change; and I do not think one could say that



“Germain” is standard usage any more at all. In America it is virtually unheard of, and even the great French Saint of Auxerre is more commonly referred to on English as Germanus, not Germain.

Fr. Innocent writes, in his letter to you, that Metropolitan Philaret “agrees with my contention.” It may be that the Metropolitan agrees that “Germanus,” abstractly considered, might be most fittingly rendered by the old English “Germain”; but I doubt very much that the Metropolitan agrees that a campaign should be undertaken to force everyone to use this unfamiliar version. On matters which do not directly concern doctrine and church practice, the Church is flexible, judging minor issues by the spirit and not the letter. The question of “Herman-Germain” is one of the letter, and should not be allowed to take the place, time, and energy of the far more important questions facing Orthodoxy in America today. That Fr. Innocent refused to serve in your parish unless you call it “St. Germain” — simply bewilders us, and seems to us a case of misplaced priorities.

Dear brother in Christ: we are sorry we had to write all this and thus, in spite of ourselves, enter into controversy on this matter. But Fr. Innocent has demanded an answer of us, and so we have given it. But we beg you: do not let this small “temptation” swerve you from your path to serve God’s Church in the name of His glorious Wonderworker. If you are at all like us, you are probably at least a little hurt by this seemingly unnecessary controversy. But that, of course, is just exactly the way the devil attacks: he will try to bring down the loftiest ideas and plans by the most trivial means. But our experience in warfare with him is built up by an appropriate and prayerful response to each such temptation and trial.

Please be assured that we are with you fully, whatever spelling your parish may adopt! Uniformity on this question, while desirable, is itself a secondary question, and the times are too critical to waste time on it, we know in any case that it is one and the same Saint who is being glorified. We will not presume to advise you on your answer to Fr. Innocent; pray to God and His Saint and they will guide you. In case of doubt, Fr. Panteleimon (I believe you said he is your spiritual father) will give you wise advice.

As for liturgical goods: we have not sold any for some time. Previously we bought some hanging icon lamps from the Central Book and Art Shop in New York City (321 East 14th St., 10003); chalices and other sacred utensils are probably best ordered directly from Greece. We no longer have any Greek addresses, but doubtless Fr. Panteleimon could give you several, and you can request catalogues from them.

Please pray for us, and keep firm your spirit of serving God’s Holy Church and praising His saints.

With love in Christ our Savior,
Seraphim, Monk